# Lutheran Voman TODAY

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Listen, God Is Calling Interview with an Advocate The Voice of God **Gathering and Sharing** 





# "Nine Ways to Support the Bereaved" response

Thank you for this article in the March 2002 LWT. Unless you have lost a loved one it is difficult to know what to say or do. Support groups were not available during my periods of grieving so it became necessary for me to find a way to begin putting my life back together. Those who grieve need to know they are not alone and can find support among their fellow church members. Thank you for printing the suggestions by Ms. Kolf.

Joann G. Jernigan—Pasadena, Maryland

Thank you so much for the excellent article by June Cerza Kolf. Having recently lost my husband, I can attest to the relevancy of her suggestions. She is right on! I have given her thoughts to our pastor, asking that they be published in our monthly newsletter. Hopefully, our members will save the article and consult it to help them give support to those who are grieving, whatever the reason. Each month brings more great articles. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Lois Allbeck—Riverside, California

We have received many positive responses to June Cerza Kolf's article. For further reading, contact Baker Book House publishers (800-877-2665) or your local bookstore for When Will I Stop Hurting? or Standing in the Shadow (for those who have lost a loved one to suicide). You can also contact Fisher Books (617-252-5200) for information about reaching out to grievers with Can I Help? and Comfort and Care in a Final Illness. Each book is priced around \$10.—the editors

# More about "Our Forgotten Sisters in Palestine"

Thank you for this perceptive article (January/February 2002 LWT). It is important for us to remember that we cannot "lump" people into groups and that there are many in the Middle East who wish things were different than they are and who are victims in many ways.

Martha Ward—Wautoma, Wisconsin

I am writing to compliment you on the wonderful changes that have been made in LWT-informative and uplifting articles, larger print in a larger-size magazine, illustrations and photos, and the Bible study set-up. The article on Palestinian Christians was particularly interesting and gave me a new understanding of the serious situation there. God bless you all.

Sincerely in Christ's love, Fran Smeak—Birmingham, Michigan

There are many different perspectives on events in the Middle East. We heard from a number of readers, most of whom were glad to see the article. There are no easy answers to the ongoing struggles.—the editors

Subscription questions? See page 51. Send letters to the editor to: Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4183; email to: lwt@elca.org. Please include your name, city, and state on all correspondence. LWT publishes letters representative of those received on a given subject. Letters may be edited for space. Letters must be signed, but requests for anonymity will be honored.

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Community can and does exist in wonderful ways in our lives, and in scripture! And one of its benefits is that it can make people bold to do what they might never have done alone.

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# The Voice of God

by Marj Leegard

I LIKE THE CONFESSION THAT APPEARS IN THE LITURGY FOR PRAYER AT THE CLOSE OF THE DAY (COMPLINE). I AM ABLE TO SAY GLIBLY AND WITH GREAT FEELING, "BY MY FAULT, BY MY OWN FAULT, BY MY OWN MOST GRIEVOUS FAULT," THOUGH I AM already forming excuses: God, you did not speak clearly enough. You did not speak quickly enough. You did not shout when there were so many noises around.

But it was not the voice of God that was absent. I absented myself from that voice. I shut my ears with every trick I knew. I surrounded myself with competing voices and waited until the deed was done before I listened.

In Psalm 46, God's voice is described as melting the earth (verse 6). In verse 10 we read, "Be still and know that I am God." The extremes of God's voice: So strong that the earth melts, and so gentle that we must be calm and still to hear it. These dimensions assure us that God's voice cannot be confined to one means, one time, one experience.

Always there is this foundational truth: We are children of God loved unto eternity. Jesus died for our sins. The true voice of God will always arise from that foundation.

We wish most fervently to hear a miracle voice with specific answers for us. We do most of that wishing when we are not calm, when we are not still. We want a voice to tell us what we want to hear, and to promise us no pain in the hearing.

I have longed for a different message, a different answer. And I have been bitterly heartbroken at what I perceived as silence. But the message was always there. God's voice was there, but I provided no silence for it, no calmness.

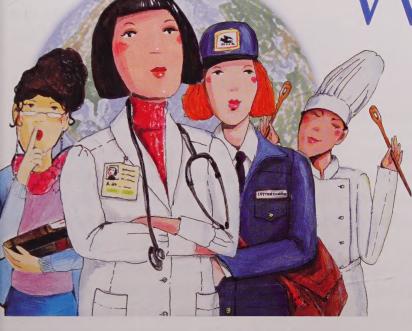
I am not a singer. I have a range of three notes, and of those notes, the upper note and lower note are not for sure. I sang with my circle one Sunday as we joined the choir for a number. One of the saints of the church said to me, "I think you should stay home from choir and send Jerome!"

There are voices prepared and sent for us. Those who come to mourn with us bring a particular grace from their own sorrows. Those who raise their voices in congregate worship make the liturgy majestic and meaningful. Those who preach bring us the word for this time and for other times when our memory will provide.

Sometimes we are the sent voices. Through all this profusion of voices and sounds and words and memories the voice of God comes, every moment in every way.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

# LIVING OUR FAITH IN THE VORLD



by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo

Vocation belongs to this world, not to heaven; it is directed toward one's neighbor, not toward God. This is an important preliminary characteristic. In [one's] vocation one is not reaching up to God, but rather bends oneself down toward the world. When one does that, God's creative work is carried on. God's work of love takes form on earth, and that which is external witnesses to God's love. — from "Luther on Vocation," by Gustav Wingren

irefighting, nursing, landscape architecture, parenting, farming, art, law, plumbing, medicine, police work, teaching, social work, writing, and other occupations all have one thing in common. For Chris-

tians who do these kinds of work, that one thing is the God-given call of vocation, the calling that we have to do work that helps others. We respond to God's call through our work in our vocation. Martin

Luther often talked about vocation as being the way we live our faith in the world.

Many years ago, the organization where I worked (a secular education and service organization) com-

missioned a study of the people who worked within the organization itself. The study showed that around 85 percent of the people who worked there considered their work to be their calling. I was astounded. I had

Listen, listen God is calling

Through the Word inviting

Offering forgiveness,

Comfort and joy. (wov, 712)

always felt that I was called to the work that I was doing and that the calling came from God, but it had never really occurred to me that other people might feel that same way.

It was not that I thought I was so much more spiritual than others; rather, "calling" or "vocation" was something that I had always heard in relation to ordained ministry. For that reason, I had never really

shared with anyone else that I felt a definite calling to my work. I was not sure how such a radical thought would be received.

After the study came out, several of us got together and talked about our understanding of calling. For all of us, the combination of faith and work had led us into vocation, into doing work that benefited others and doing it out of our response to God.

# **Called to Many Kinds of Work**

Work as a call from God has traditionally been understood in church circles as a calling to ordained ministry. However, Martin Luther, in writing about his doctrine of vocation, talked about three different meanings of vocation. They are:

- the proclamation of the gospel through which human beings are called to be children of God
- the work that each one does
- the call to the office of preaching

The first and the second are related. Vocation, or calling, is the way we live out our faith in response to the gospel and to those around us. In other words, the work we do, no matter what it is and how we do it, becomes the way we proclaim the love of God to others.

Many people have great passion for their work and the people they serve, and that passion shows whenever they talk about what they do. They say such things as, "I know I am where I'm supposed to be," or "I can't think of anything else I would rather be doing," or "I know God has put me here for a reason." They talk about work that might not seem to be a call from God in terms that show that they really do live out their life's work in response to their relationship with God.



One older woman I knew, age 91 at the time, spent all her available time visiting shut-ins and people in nursing homes. She brought them little presents and the gift of God's word. The ministry of presence and visiting became her vocation. She put it this way: "I am so glad that God has given me the chance to help make the lives of these older folks meaningful. I sing to them, I read to them, and I just tell them about God's love."

At times, the vocation that we have shows itself to others when we don't even realize it. An elected official said of someone at my church, "You know, he really lives his faith. There are other people who do things to help others, but it often seems to be to see what they can get out of it. He always does what he does out of a sincere desire to do what God wants. You know that his faith is an important part of him." In other words, Christian vocation flows out of faith. Faith forms the way we meet each situation and gives meaning to the work that we do.

Vocation is often present in the way we do our work. A woman once told me of helping a customer one day in the course of her job. The customer said, "I can tell you love the Lord by the way you have helped me today." She told me that she was surprised at this, because she was "just doing her job" the way she felt called to do it.

# **Vocation within Our Roles**

Luther talked of vocation as present in the roles that we fill in our families. Mothers and fathers often talk about the awe-inspiring task that is theirs in raising their children from birth to "infinity and beyond." Middle-age adults talk of their responsibilities as children, parents, and grandparents. One young woman, after a series of miscarriages, had wondered why the role or vocation of motherhood seemed not to be for her when it was such a desire of her heart. She recently adopted a little girl and shared with her whole congregation the gift it is to be a real and present part of her daughter's life each day.

Vocation holds fast even when circumstances and structures change. Members of the organization I mentioned earlier, who felt their work was a calling, spoke during an intense reorganization of their organization. They felt that even with the changes there was a special mission—a calling—that enabled them to hold onto the core reason for doing the work they do.

Vocation is not always the most lucrative enterprise, although it can be. A storytelling woman tells of her work, which is often financially unstable: "I know God calls me to do this. Why? Because all of my life I have had an interest in doing what I do, and deep inside I know that God gave me the interest and the talent. I need to use them."

Vocation is a gift from God. It is often particular to the person who has it. This means that what is

vocation (or a special gift) to you may very well not be the same for me. Vocation is made up of things that bring you passion, gifts and talents that God has given you, things that make you come alive with the desire to do them, the "heart" and commitment you bring to the work that you do, no matter what the work. These are all part of what makes up vocation.

# **Discerning One's Vocation**

The stories in this article are about people who have found their vocation.

They know what it is to do vocation and understand that their passion comes from God working through them. Their response to God is to do the work, knowing that their faith shines through that work and points others to God. Knowing that helps them to "hang in there" through the tough times that come with any vocation.

Determining one's vocation comes through discernment, through really paying attention to what God's spirit and our own spirit are saying to us. Living in the reality and knowledge of our vocations requires us to pay attention to the work that God does in and through us. It requires us to step back and actually think about what just comes naturally to us. It makes us think about those things as a gift and responsibility from God.

God's gift of vocation or calling makes the world a better place. Knowing your vocation or calling, knowing that the work you do is work that God does through you, can really change your view of work and yourself. So ask yourself, "What is my vocation? What are the things I feel passionate about? What do I really enjoy about my work? How do I feel God working through me?"

If the answer is slow in coming, take some quiet time for prayer and meditation to help you with it. Ask your friends and family what they see as the particular gifts that you bring to your work or your role in society. Those around us are often quicker to see God's gifts in us than we are.

May you be blessed in the vocation to which God has called you.

Linda Johnson Seyenkulo is a pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Chicago.





The Conversion of St. Paul by Sir Peter Paul Rubens, Oil on Canvas

# LISTEN, GOD IS CALLING

"Who did you say is calling? God? For me?"

by Michael Cooper-White

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE, ISN'T IT, that God is calling you and me? We don't find ourselves called as Moses did, when he heard the voice of God as he paused by a burning bush. Rarely do our calls come in dramatic moments, as they did for Jesus' first disciples who dropped everything at his call to "Follow me." Hardly anyone these days is called the way God called Saul, who was blinded on the road to Damascus.

No, for most of us, our callings come more ambiguously, are recognized more slowly, and heeded haltingly.

Our experiences of being called are more akin to that of the two who walked beside the stranger on the road to Emmaus. They did not hear the call at first, nor did they recognize their holy caller. It was only later on, in the breaking of the bread at table, that they understood it was Jesus calling them to a new resurrection reality.

#### WE ARE ALL CALLED

One signal contribution of the Lutheran reformation was its radical reinterpretation of the understanding of call. Not only are priests, bishops, and the pope called by God, emphasized Luther. Through baptism, every Christian is ordained into a particular ministry. This notion of the priesthood of all believers goes hand-in-glove with our present emphasis on ministry in daily life.

Every Christian, be she pastor, physician, laborer, or homemaker, and every believer, be he in business, education, or the military, is called by God. The very word we use to describe our occupation comes from this notion—vocation comes from the Latin verb *vocare*, "to call." In our daily vocations, and in our callings in our home and in community, we carry out our ministries.

#### CALLS IN THE BIBLE

Another good name for the Bible would be the Book of Calls! From Genesis to Revelation, we find one story after another of God's call and someone's response.

In the Garden of Eden, after all the other creatures were brought forth, God called Adam and Eve into being. Our first forebears were called to be stewards, to name and tend the garden. When they failed in their stewardship by overstepping their boundaries, God reissued the call to faithfulness on the other side of Eden.

Sometimes God's call seems preposterous. It must have been so for Noah, who was called to build an ark when it wasn't even raining! Just as Noah was called into the ark in faith, so he was called out of the ark when there was still water all around. God's call to exit the ark was coupled with a promise that never again would the divine response to human rebellion be worldwide retribution.

In the early forming of a people to journey in pursuit of a promised land, God issued a call to Abraham and Sarah. Their call was to "go from your country and your kindred . . . to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). They were sent out without any destination programmed into their Global Positioning System! After a brief sojourn in the land of Canaan, when famine came, Abraham and Sarah were led into Egypt. Sometimes we too may be called to go, and at other times to stay; on occasion we may be called to leave our present surroundings, or to settle more deeply into them. Practical matters like earning our daily bread often must be considered in pondering the where and when of a call.

Many of those whose calls are recorded in scripture were at first unwilling, often because they felt unworthy. When called to be the great liberator, Moses protested: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11) When the divine call came to Isaiah the prophet, he likewise protested: "Woe is me! For I am lost; I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:6). Young Jeremiah's hesitancy when confronted with the vocational call to be a prophet was: "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Isaiah 1:6).

In the face of every protest, however, God stood firm in sounding the call. "I will be with you," was the caller's repeated resounding promise in the face of the hesitant callee's excuses. And while reluctant

# At any point along life's journey, the call may come to move in a different direction.

at first, those called by God marshaled their courage and carried out their vocations.

No figure in all of scripture shines more brightly in this regard than Mary. Although troubled at first by the angel's appearance and declaration of the nature of her vocation, Mary accepted her call and made her promise to God: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

#### CALLED IN ALL CONDITIONS ...

In the first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul exhorts the early Christians, "Consider your calls, sisters and brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1:26). Indeed, we are called in all conditions of life. No matter whether we are well educated or feel ourselves unprepared, whether we have great riches or find ourselves with very limited resources, God is out to get us!

In my experience, it is often those who feel most unworthy of the call who offer some of the finest witness to their faith. The humble rural peasants and urban shantytown dwellers of Latin America have preached the most powerful sermons to me simply by their lives of faithful service and incredible generosity.

Among the biblical characters whose response to Jesus' call I find most compelling is the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). This "woman with a past," as they say, found her voice even as she loaned Jesus her bucket. Because of her witness-"he told me all that I ever did"-many of her neighbors came to faith in Jesus also.

# AND AT ALL AGES AND IN ALL STAGES OF LIFE

As a seminary president, I often visit congregations to tell the story of our particular institutional calling as a seminary of the church. Probably the most frequently asked question is, "How old are your students?" My response is that God calls people to prepare for service as pastors, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, or theologically trained lay people at all ages and in all stages of life.

Our seminary student bodies include all sorts of interesting folks these days! Some come single, others married, some divorced or widowed; some with children, quite a few with grandchildren. Some are able to live on campus and study full-time; many are part-timers who must keep their day jobs and commute considerable distances.

However, I am quick to add that heeding the call of God by no means equates with going off to seminary. In fact, for some pastors and other church workers, there comes a time to leave that particular calling and work in other arenas. At any point along life's journey, the call may come to move in a different direction. For many of us, the call is to continue in what we are doing with a renewed sense of vocation and stewardship for our occupation, our families, and our friendships as our God-given ministries.

# CALLED COLLECTIVELY AS **COMMUNITIES OF FAITH**

While it's important to reflect on our call as individuals, it's also important to be reminded that we are called as communities of God's faithful people.

Over and over again in the New Testament epistles, Paul addressed himself to faith communities. He reminded and exhorted them to lean into and live up to their collective calling as the Body of Christ.

So not only do I as an individual have a call and a vocation, but my congregation has a mission too. Congregations together in a community have a stewardship responsibility for their common geographical parish. A synod has a call given its particular context and challenges. And our entire church is called as part of the larger one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church to fulfill God's mission on earth.

Likewise, an organization or institution of the church is under God's call to fulfill its purpose. In the seminary where I serve, we have been about a process of prayerful discernment, resulting in the adoption of a long-range plan titled "Directions for the Decade." While calls may initially be intuited and somewhat vague, they emerge into specific and focused missions. "Go and do this, being thus and so along the way," is the usual nature of the divine calls reflected in the Bible. And the biblical calls, frequently issued initially to individuals, often result in the mobilization of faith communities for the proclamation of the word and for service in God's name.

# THE STATUS OF CHURCH VOCATIONS

I hope that I have reinforced our Lutheran (though certainly shared by other Christians) convictions about the priesthood of all believers, but I would be remiss in my particular calling if I did not say a bit about the need in our church for what Roman Catholics have long referred to as "vocations." We need more people in our seminaries and other centers of theological education preparing to serve the church!

When the ELCA began its life in 1988, approximately 1,000 congregations were without a permanently called pastor. That number has now more than doubled ("Ministry Needs and Resources in the 21st Century," ELCA Division for Ministry 2000). Each year, the number of available seminary graduates is fewer than half those needed by congregations throughout the church. With today's pastor averaging 51 years of age, and a typical seminary graduate in her or his late 30s or early 40s, this clergy shortage will only grow in the years ahead if we do not prepare more leaders. Some creative efforts are underway in many places to meet the need with trained lay leaders. But the majority of congregations feel the need for an ordained minister to serve in partnership with the laity.

Even as we affirm every sister and brother in her or his calling, so we can encourage those we think have the gifts and graces for full-time ecclesial ministry to consider a possible call to serve as a pastor or on one of the church's lay rosters. "And how are they to hear without preachers? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15)

#### LISTEN, GOD IS CALLING YOU!

The Bible begins with a call in the garden and ends with a vision of a holy city inhabited by those who respond to the Spirit's call, "Come!" Called at the beginning of our lives in Christ by the Alpha-call of baptism, we shall be called again at life's end by the Omega-call of the resurrection! In the meantime, let us be confident that each of us is called by God right where we are, as we are with all our gifts and gaffes, all our strengths and shortcomings. We are also called collectively as the community of the faithful. As you go about your daily duties, how exciting that you can share with others this witness: God is calling, and no, it's not a wrong number!

The Rev. Michael Cooper-White is president of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Penn.



#### MOTHERING SEASONS

# **God Is Calling Mothers**

by Kirsi Stjerna

#### I WAS PRAYING TO SEE SEALS.

It was the only time in my life when I was praying for a sign, an unmistakable sign, to help me with my confused discernment. I wanted to see a seal.

I had been offered a teaching-preaching job that sounded tailor-made for me, except for one thingthere seemed to be too many unknowns and anxieties involved. I felt ambivalent.

Walking along a Massachusetts beach one day, I got this idea: "The sight of a seal, right here, would do it."

I didn't see a seal. I saw two seals-swimming off that very beach where seals had never been seen before, or at least that's what the locals said.

But then I forgot: What exactly had I prayed for? Was the sign of a seal to tell me to take the job, or to turn it down? I quickly proceeded to make another deal with God: "If those seals float right over here, then I know that I have to take the job." Well, the seals floated around, approached me, and were gone. I wasn't sure, though, whether they had come close enough to qualify as another sign.

After much speculation, I concluded that the only thing that could prevent me from going would be getting pregnant-which I did, miraculously soon. That sign I took more seriously. I didn't take the job. And I have regretted it ever since.

My discernment process had many sides to it. One was simply planning for a successful career, finding my place to contribute. Then there was the added dimension of motherhood. I had not been a mother before and didn't know quite what the demands would be. So there I was, giving my full attention to the newborn baby, while accepting an accumulating number of "light" projects to work on, "on the side," in between nursing and diaper changing.

The drive inside me for my other calling was still there and was too strong to put on hold. The sense of call was there, and so was the surprising second chance.

Not too long after my child was born, I found myself working two part-time jobs that together provided nearly identical responsibilities to the job I had turned down. While giving my call another chance, I didn't stop being a mother. Responding to this double call certainly made things more difficult, but it also made my life more satisfying.

Looking back at the choices I've made, it seems that God has given me plenty of opportunities to decide where I want to go. My call is to teach and preach, just as much as I'm living my other daily call to be a mother. My call to the ministry of teaching has always filled me with passion and joy. That drive has led me where I am right now-able to do full-time what I love and what I sense is my call.

My children-both of them now-are not privileged to have their mom around all the time, but they do have a happily busy mom. This said, though, dividing one's attention between two callings comes with varying degrees of pain, guilt, compromises, and forgettings. (I qualify as the not-the-mother-ofthe-year who forgets both little and big things on a regular basis.) There is definitely a price to pay for answering double calls.

Young women are growing up with a broader sense of calling and bigger dreams than many of our mothers did. Motherhood, for many women today, isn't necessarily an exclusive call but part of a bigger picture-and a holy part. In our seminary we have quite a few women, younger and older, who have come to terms with their sense of call to ministry, whether they are mothers or not. For many it has meant years of discernment and wondering while waiting for the right moment and sufficient affirmation



to follow their dreams to become a minister or a teacher of the church.

These women bring remarkable energy to campus with their passion and delight in the unfolding of their calls. I love to hear their call stories as much as I enjoy hearing labor stories—they demonstrate how manifold are the mysterious ways God's call can be found. We have learned how it takes a while to figure things out, how we look for signs while deep in our hearts we know what we need to do, how we get second chances, how the call can be persistent, overwhelming, and empowering.

These women remind me of two special mothers from the past. One is Katie Luther (1499–1552), mother of six, who found her calling first in a convent, then in her home, nurturing her family and the whole world in her kitchen and expanding her call to include management of the large household. Her life wasn't easy, but she found peace in her calling. So did Birgitta of Sweden (1303-1373), a mother of eight children, who had a specific call from childhood to serve God and the world through her gift of prophecy. Her struggle was with the bonds of motherhood, which she found compromising her call to serve God. That story resonates with modern women's sometimes opposite struggle.

Women from the past and present illustrate how there are many layers to our calls, many variables, and much struggle-much to gain and much to lose. They remind us of the power of God-given passion, of how, when we follow that, we know we are on a right path. With or without seals.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. She is a member of Christ Lutheran, Gettysburg, Penn.

As the door locked behind me, signaling the end of my first visit to the county juvenile detention center in San Jose, California, I began praying — more like complaining. "Is this chaplain position serving 350 delinquent teens really where you are calling me, God?

What do I have to offer these kids? I can't find my way in raising two teenage boys of my own! I know I mentioned that I enjoyed leading worship and preaching at the prison ... but juvenile delinquents?"





by Anne Tracy Carlson

# STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER

I TEND TO ARGUE WITH GOD about the direction of my life. It never seems to be what I would have selected if it had been left completely up to me. But within a week of beginning my chaplaincy at the juvenile detention center, I recognized the wisdom of

God and the accompanying presence of the Spirit in the halls and cells of the center. I discovered my passion for incarcerated youth and their accompanying difficulties-abuse, poverty, immigration and language issues, physical, mental, learning and social

disabilities, and victimization by patronizing justice systems and the chaotic social, educational, and health services systems. My life was transformed by engaging their lives.

As faithful disciples of Jesus, we are called to provide for these children a healthy, safe, and faithful environment so that they may grow into healthy adults. Both the religious and secular communities have ignored the importance of spiritual healing for the young people in this situation. At the very least, we are called to visit them in prison and allow their spirits to touch our spirits. And nowhere is the fragmentation of our community, our culture, and our spirits more evident than in the experience of a minor's being incarcerated and then trying to rebuild a life after incarceration.

### **EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL** RESPONSES TO INCARCERATION

When a youth (10 to 17 years of age or younger) is arrested and brought to a juvenile detention center, it is seldom that young person's first encounter with the justice system or social welfare system. Because of truancy, acting out, and dysfunctional family life, or poverty and homelessness, a child has encountered one of these systems long before arrest and detention. However, arrest and detention call forth the same internal responses every time, whether the first time or the tenth time.

The first reactions include shock and disbelief. Adrenaline is high, a fight-or-flight emotional response sets in, and the brain is unable to shift into clear, reasoned thinking. "How do I get out of this?" or "What will my parent(s) do?" are the questions swirling around like a whirlpool.

Arrest is one of the most "religious" moments in a kid's life. "Oh God, get me out of this mess!" is the instinctive prayer of the human condition. Or "God, if you get me out of this, I will . . . ." Being arrested forces someone out of the childhood world and way of thinking and into the adult world of police officers, judges, probation officers (P.O.'s), and so forth. The child's perception of God, at this stage, oscillates between magical rescuer and judge and jury.

The second reaction is anger or depression-opposite ends of the same continuum. On one end, there is anger, with verbal or possibly physical combativeness: "You have no right to do this to me!" Depression, at the other end, leaves the youth saying, "I don't know. I can't remember." The young person may be distracted, unable to hear or answer any questions, and appears to be tuned out. In this stage, the thought of God rarely comes up. "Who cares about God, anyway?" may be the response. But what underlies this may be the thought, "So where is God? What kind of God are you?"

#### The Experience of Incarceration

Correctional institutions identify imprisoned youths' basic needs and rights which must be met. So the institution provides:

#### shelter food

security for safety, limiting movement and access to programs or other people

educational services, sometimes needs-appropriate

medical services mental health services for crisis counseling

medications as previously prescribed or as needed, and segregation as needed programs for diversion into

nity settings a chaplain to meet state requirements (staff and administration seldom see chaplains as much help, but suppose that we

can't hurt!)

other more appropriate commu-

Specialists, professionals, and agencies struggle to meet these needs within the limitations of their agency, budget, staffing, and institutional accessibility. So spiritual needs are squeezed into a small, narrowly defined time, place, and person-the chaplain.

#### Insane

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Denial, justification, and diminishing then often set in as a third reaction. "I didn't do it." "This isn't fair." "I just stopped there to see what's up." "It was someone else's idea." "It's not as bad as they make it sound." The God response here is, "The devil made me do it." "God is not fair." "God's out to get me." All of us, at one time or another, justify ourselves to God.

The next reaction arrives in the midst of all these reactions, but really shows up a few days after being locked up. It comes and goes from then on. It's confusion and frustration. "What will happen to me?" "What is the (defender, P.O., social worker) doing?" "Who's in charge here?" "What are the rules and expectations?" "No one ever explains anything to me." "No one talks to me." Spiritually, the young person wonders where God is. "Does God even know I'm here, or care?"

The next set of responses is vacillation between fear and resignation. On the one side is, "Everyone is my enemy; everyone is out to get me." "I can't do anything right." "Who can I trust?" The God issues sound similar: "God betrayed me. Can I trust God?" On the other side is, "No one cares." "No one wants to really help." "Everyone blames me, so I must be bad." "I shouldn't expect any better, considering my family or background." "I'm unlovable." At this point, God is seen as the punisher. "God put me here to get even. I deserve this-I'm a mistake. There's no hope for me."

### That Special Man

As long is I can remember, my mor told me of a man; a very important man, which I never wanted to know. Sixteen years of my life spent lonely, depressed,

I became very dependant on drugs, and the Devil had

That special man is Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. No one will ever destroy that beautiful relationship

(by Star, written in Juvenile Hall on a torn half-sheet of paper in pencil and sent to me)

All these responses can vary in their order of occurrence and intensity. A youth can be overwhelmed by the jumble of emotions, unable to sort them out, unable to formulate any rational response to the situation. Young people in such a dilemma often lose themselves in a sea of confusion, frustration, despair, and hopelessness, and their spiritual issues are intensified and muddled when incarcerated. The pressing questions for all youth as they mature include:

Who am 1?

Who is God?

Am I loved or even lovable?

What does God want or expect?

Am I forgiven or forgivable?

What can God do for me? (Narcissism is normal at this age.)

What can I do for myself?

What is the purpose in all of this? (This question is a clear sign of maturity.)

Fear, helplessness, loneliness, guilt, powerlessness, desire to escape, thoughts of suicide-these are

natural feelings for one who is incarcerated. And children in this situation need adults in addition to their parents who will stand with them, who will share their pain, who will listen patiently without judgment, disbelief, or blaming, who will pray for and with them, who will support their healing. All these children need to know that there are adults in our communities who will assist them in regaining control of their lives.

#### THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

We must ask ourselves, "What can the religious community do to support children during and after incarceration?" Of course, we should also examine what we can do to prevent such situations. I have included a list of possibilities—by no means exhaustive-that may help us better address this question. I encourage you to generate your own additions.

- 1. Get involved with your local detention center for youth. Bring in tutoring, counseling, worship, or Bible study.
- 2. All Kids Are Our Kids is a book by Dr. Peter Benson. He and the research staff of Search Institute in Minneapolis have identified 40 assets all children need in order to grow up responsible and healthy. The religious community must support the concept that we have a responsibility for all the children of our community, not just our own.
- 3. Become a "Safe Haven" for kids. This is an initiative from the 1997 ELCA assembly that urges congregations to build upon their assets and resources within the context of their local communities as they support and nurture children and their families or caregivers.
- 4. Provide a sacred time and space in which God's presence can nurture and guide children's lives. Churches can provide structured activities for

children with far too much unstructured time in their lives. These might include:

- after-school programs
- · worship experiences that are age- and cultureappropriate
- · cultural events that reflect neighborhood
- · outlets for (and tutoring in) the arts, dance, theater, and so forth
- a place for prayer and quiet time
- 5. Participate with the wider community in developing:
  - restorative justice projects
  - community after-care after incarceration
  - housing for foster children over 18
  - · detention reform to keep more children out of the justice system
- Pray. Pray with and for the children who are in or headed for juvenile detention. Pray weekly in worship, and remember that they are our children, too. Remember them into the Body of Christ as our own children.

God his own [children] doth tend and nourish, in his holy courts they flourish.

From all evil things he spares them, in his mighty arms he bears them. (Children of the Heavenly Father, LBW 474)

Can we do any less? Are we not all standing in the need of prayer?

Rev. Anne Tracy Carlson is a pastor at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in San Jose, California. She served as the Probation Department chaplain to 800 youth in five juvenile detention facilities for eight years. Since 1990 she has served as a county-appointed commissioner on the Child Abuse Council of Santa Clara County. She contributed to the resource Risky Business: Choosing Change for Women of the ELCA in 1999.



# **How Do You Rest and Renew?**

F or rest and renewal, our women's group goes on an annual retreat to Luther Glen Conference Center in Yucaipa, California. Our retreats include a Bible study, fellowship, fun, food, and love of God.

One year 24 women participated in the retreat. We gathered over a holiday weekend, making it possible for most of us to stay for three full nights. When it snowed, we played outside like young girls. This year it was beautiful and sunny, so we hiked, enjoying the great outdoors.

Because we know that we are better mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, citizens, and Christians when we take care of ourselves, no one minded leaving our families during this brief retreat.

So go and retreat! Be rested and fruitful for the whole year because you took a three-day weekend with 24 of your closest friends!

Janet Buckner-San Diego, California St. Andrew's Lutheran Church

F or the past seven years, my church has organized a women's canoe trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota.

The theme is from Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." It is an invitation to go out to the beauty of God's great North Woods and get away from the busyness and responsibilities of work and family.

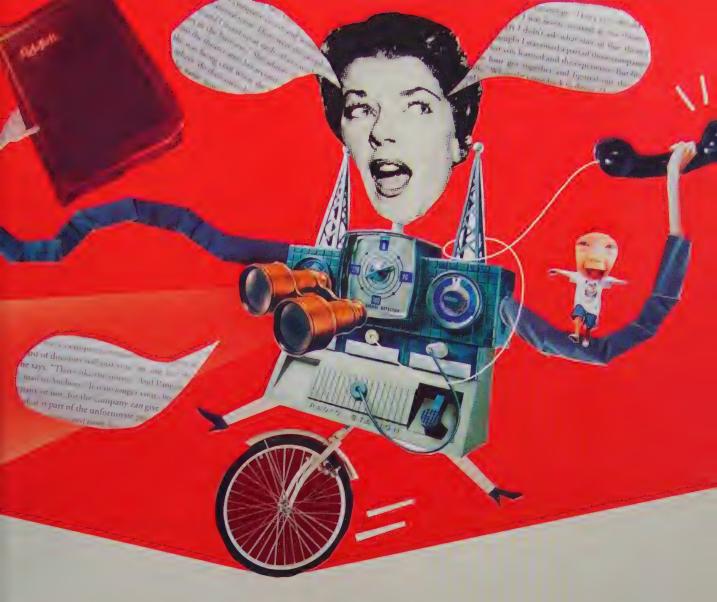
Each year, those who participate find it to be an inspiring, healing, and relaxing experience. It clears my mind so I can have the opportunity to be still and listen for God's call in my life.

Sometimes it is during quiet moments with a morning cup of coffee, or sitting on a rock watching a beautiful sunset with my mind and body at rest, that the answers to questions or problems come. A feeling of total satisfaction from choices well made and time well spent fills me. Sometimes I hear God's call when I am listening to the experiences of others and sharing mine with them.

I enjoy talking and sharing laughter with women from every stage of life. The exchanging of life and faith stories over peanut butter and trail mix is one of my favorite parts. I get the opportunity to catch up, as well as deepen my friendships with those who come every year. I also meet new women and hear their stories.

After each trip, I return home physically tired. But I realize something else that happens, too. Although there is always a different group of women participating, different conversations, different weather, and a different campsite, I return from these trips refreshed and renewed.

Karen Moberg—Blaine, Minnesota Our Savior's Lutheran Church



# HEEDING GOD'S CALL AND BALANCING FAMILY

by Kathie Bender Schwich

I have never liked the call waiting feature on my telephone.

If I am in the middle of a conversation that I initiated, I think it is rude for me to say to the person on the other end of the line, "Could you hold on a minute? Another call is coming through." Likewise, if I am talking to someone who called me, I prefer to follow the "first come, first served" protocol and not put that person on hold to take another call.

There are times, however, when the routine of my life feels a lot like call waiting. When I first answered God's call to serve the church through ordained ministry, I was unmarried and had no other commitments vying for my time and attention. During my first call, the members of my congregation had the luxury of my availability whenever it was needed. I was able to give my complete attention to this call that God had extended, and I was happy to give it my all.

#### ANSWERING ALL THE CALLS

A few years later, that call waiting beep came on the line. I was blessed with the call to be a wife (of a man who is also a pastor) and stepmother. I willingly answered that call as well, and I was thankful for this new sense of wholeness in my life. Yes, I do believe that marriage and parenthood are calls from God as valid as a call to rostered ministry.

Rather than choose to put my professional call on hold to pursue marriage and the care of two small boys, I made the decision to embrace all these callings. Rather than taking a call waiting approach, I approached my many roles with a party line view, seeing each one as an important part of the person God had called me to be. And when I later answered the call to motherhood, giving birth to a son of my own, the circuits became even busier.

#### **BALANCING THE CALLS**

Organized chaos was now the order of the day; my little red calendar book no longer had enough space to accommodate the many appointments and details I needed to list. I found myself in a situation that no doubt every parent who is a full-time professional faces: How can I balance all my calls? Through much prayer, planning, and assistance from others, we have been able to keep things in balance. However, it hasn't been without its moments of humor and struggle. There are days when I feel like the Erma Bombeck of the clergy set.

When our son was an infant, my husband and I each served different congregations. The baby usually accompanied me on Sunday mornings and a willing parishioner cared for him during the services. During one particular service, Jerome's colic was in full force, and the noise and stress was too much for this wonderful lady. So there I was in the chancel, swaying to the hymn of the day in alb and chasuble, infant in my

arms and bottle of formula in my hand. The congregation graciously took it in stride.

Early in my life as a parish pastor, I prided myself on my commitment to pastoral care. When someone in crisis needed a pastor, I was there. It didn't matter what time it was or what else I might be involved in; these situations took priority. That didn't change after I married, but now it called for skills any juggler on the Ringling Brothers circuit would recognize. If someone in the midst of a crisis called me just as the day care center was closing, I would call my husband to see whose plans could be changed more easily. Sometimes I would carry out my responsibilities with a child in tow. One evening as I was headed home with our son, my cell phone rang with a call from the nursing home administrator about a member of my congregation who was near death. I remain indebted to this kind administrator, who entertained my three-year-old with the pencils and paper clips on her desk while I ministered to this member of my flock during the last hours of his life.

#### **CAREFUL PLANNING**

I once heard the son of a fellow pastor say that when he grew up, he wanted to be a mail carrier. When asked why he didn't want to be a pastor like his dad, the boy replied, "Because mail carriers get to stay at home at night with their children." My husband and I are intentional about making time for family nights when all five of us have dinner together. We even resist answering ringing phones during mealtime. That is what answering machines are for.

Most nights, one of us is home to tuck our children into bed. Only once have I lied to our son and told him about needing to leave to be with a family friend who needed my help. Fearing that church might become a four-letter word for him, I couldn't bring myself to admit that I was really going to one

more meeting at church. I want church to be something positive in his life, not the place that takes his parents away so often.

My husband and I have weekly calendar meetings when we decide who will be attending report card pick-up at school, driving our oldest to his piano lesson, or cooking dinner during the week. We also work hard to plan "date nights" for the two of us, even if our date consists of attending the reception for the wedding where one of us just officiated! We realize the importance of nurturing our relationship in order to carry out our other calls in life. We have been blessed with congregations and colleagues who honor and support these sacred times in our life together. There is no more valued gift a congregation can give its pastor than an evening of free babysitting and a gift certificate for an evening out.

#### **GIVING GOOD ATTENTION**

Now that neither one of us serves in parish ministry, the balancing act has taken on new dimensions. Each of us is required to travel for work to various places and for varying lengths of time. When we are away, we call home every evening to talk to the children and each other. Our time away makes the times when we are home together even more special. Our yearly family vacation is something we hold dear; long hours together in the minivan en route to faraway corners of this great land provide excellent opportunities to enjoy one another's company, laugh at each other's stories, and to get reconnected on a more intimate level.

Sunday mornings are a challenge, as often we head off in separate directions to preach to different congregations. Our youngest son often asks, "Which church are we going to today, and who is going to be the pastor?" He has become quite a connoisseur of how members of a congregation pass the peace and what is served at the coffee hour. As often as possible,

the spouse who isn't committed on a Sunday travels along with the one who is, providing an opportunity for our family to worship together.

#### EACH BENEFITING FROM THE OTHER

Like so many others, I have responded to all the callings in my life and have grown in the ways they have complemented each other. My role as wife and mother has deepened my pastoral understanding and appreciation for what others are experiencing as they deal with family troubles or relationship difficulties. There are many times now when I as pastor can say, "I know how you feel," and I do. My role as pastor has helped me to be a more understanding member of the family (I hope), and has convicted me when my impatience reminds me that I am often more human than reverent. I have been blessed to preside at my son's baptism, preach at my nephew's wedding, and officiate at my uncle's funeral. During the rough times, I have been blessed by the presence of pastoral colleagues who offered their support and allowed me to grieve.

There are moments, as I juggle being pastor, wife, and mother, when I would love to say, "Can I put this call on hold while I take care of another?" I know that my life cannot be compartmentalized that way. I am able to serve in each of these roles because of what I have learned in the others. Rather than wishing for call waiting, I willingly respond to God's callings, in faith that the one who has called me to these responsibilities will give me the strength and the stamina I need to carry them out well.

Pastor Kathie Bender Schwich serves as an executive assistant to the presiding bishop and as director of the Department for Synodical Relations at the ELCA. She has also served as a parish pastor and on the staff of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod.



# **Books That Explore Who We Are**

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

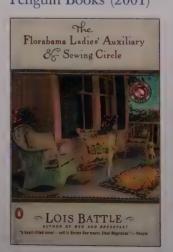
SOON WE'LL BE GATHERING IN PHILADELPHIA, A CHATTY, INVIGORATED GAGGLE OF WOMEN. THIS WILL BE THE FIFTH TRIENNIAL GATHERING I'VE ATTENDED. AND ONE OF THE THINGS I LIKE BEST ABOUT THESE GATHERINGS IS SIMPLY BEING IN THE company of women. Voices will be raised, feet will dance, tears will be shed. And all these things will happen around issues at the core of who we are as Christian women.

Not surprisingly, I gravitate toward novels that explore the elements of the female life. The characters in these novels, whether it's Little Women or The Women's Room, help me understand who I am and how I can deal with the issues that are unique to women. Like triennial gatherings, these books offer a distinctive place in which to be in the company of women.

Both books reviewed in this column are something more than just novels of being in the company of women. Each book includes a discussion guide, offering an introduction to the book, an interview with the author, and questions for discussion. For some time now, publishers have been offering book discussion guides in leaflet form and on web sites, but this latest method of including the guide right in the book is handy. Look for these as you make your next reading selection.

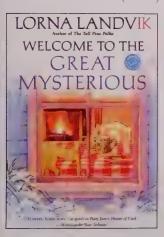
Since both books contain reader's guides, I offer some discussion-starting questions that spring from the pages of both books—and from the experiences we are likely to share in Philadelphia at the Triennial Gathering. Who are the women who have supported you in your bleakest days? What made their support different from the support offered you by men? How has your witness been stronger when combined with the witness of other women? (For those of you carpooling to the Triennial Gathering or facing a long bus ride to Philadelphia, you can use these questions as discussion starters, whether or not you're reading these books!)

The Florabama Ladies' Auxiliary & Sewing Circle by Lois Battle Penguin Books (2001)



Bonnie Duke Cullman finds herself divorced, alone, and about to begin a new job. She's a former debutante who had an active social schedule and volunteer life during her marriage, but she finds herself woefully unprepared for the life of a single working woman. Unbeknownst to her, Bonnie's father pulls some strings, and Bonnie lands a job heading a displaced homemakers' program at a community college in Florabama, Alabama. As Bonnie begins her work, a local lingerie factory shuts down, leaving many women in need of Bonnie's services. Bonnie and the former factory workers forge an improbable alliance through which they learn about themselves, their skills and abilities, and the power that they hold. This is a story of hope, resiliency, and fortitude.

Welcome to the Great Mysterious by Lorna Landvik Ballantine Books (2000)



Geneva Jordan found fame on stage, screen, and television. Now she finds love in her 13-year-old nephew, a boy with Down syndrome. Geneva cares for her nephew, Rich, while his parents (Geneva's twin sister and her husband) take a much-needed

vacation. Rich forces Geneva out of her egotistical self and helps her rediscover her roots. In making those discoveries. Geneva comes face to face with life's big questions and finds some surprising answers. The humorous and fun-loving writing style that makes Lorna Landvik famous works surprisingly well in tackling the thorny questions Rich and Geneva explore.

# For further reading

A Room of One's Own, by Virginia Woolf (Harcourt, Inc., 1929). A quintessential exploration of a woman's need for self-expression.



How to Make an American Quilt, by Whitney Otto (Ballantine Books, 1992). An exploration of how women pass their collective wisdom from generation to generation, told in the context of making a wedding quilt.

The Persian Pickle Club, by Sandra Dallas (St. Martin's Press, 1996). A lighthearted look at the serious bonds of female friendship, set in the rural Kansas of the 1930s.

Linda Post Bushkofsky most recently served as associate synod executive for communication and interpretation for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). On August 1 this year, she will begin a new position as executive director of Women of the ELCA.

y husband and I fish for salmon on the Columbia River. The runs of Columbia River salmon are a shadow of their former abundance, unable to coexist with civilization in all its demanding forms—water for irrigation, hydroelectric power, dredged shipping lanes, and sewage disposal.

My husband is a fourth-generation fisherman on the river, and we have seen our livelihood diminish due to ecological changes that have disturbed the salmon's habitat and diminished its ability to support the fish. At the same time, we have seen the

farming and timber industries that were also the mainstays of our communities dwindle. Around us we see our little communities up and down the river struggling, taking on the scruffy look of places where not much is happening. The bustle and energy of thriving towns are missing. And we watch our children leave to find opportunity elsewhere.

I wonder sometimes if Peter, Andrew, James, and John saw the same thing happening to their beloved little communities in Galilee. The Romans transformed the ecology of the Sea of Galilee by their extensive building projects; they transformed its economy by reorganizing the fisheries and agriculture along Roman patterns. In a couple of generations, Galilee changed from the place the historian Josephus described as "the ambition of nature" to the place where the fishermen could say "We fished all night and caught nothing." Did they turn their attention toward Jesus as the vision of what the economy of Galilee should be—instead of thrusting them to the margins of society as the Roman vision had?

In our own time, the industrial processes have transformed our ecology, leaving devastated economies and children and families in great need. In response, we have focused on providing reasonable-cost family support services through the St. James Family Center. Although this is a ministry of St. James

"But ask the animals and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you." (Job 12:7–8)

Episcopal Church, funding for the programs comes from a variety of sources, including, recently, Women of the ELCA, who formed Project Hope. The funding provides greatly needed family support services.

The larger issue remains, however: How shall we live so that the salmon, trees, and plants can live and support communities again? We are all linked, not only by our faith but also by how we use the stuff of life around us—water, air, natural resources, and food. What we use, what we waste, what we want, and what we leave alone all have an effect beyond our own immediate lives and out to the margins of society. And out on the margins of society we find Jesus, whose life of simplicity and compassion provides the model for our own Christian living today.

In the next issue of *LWT*, we'll continue to explore this story in cooperation with the ELCA's department of Environmental Education and Advocacy.—the editors

Irene Martin is a writer and Episcopal priest at St. James in Cathlamet, Wash.





# **How Do You Discern God's Call?**

ime and again, God uses others to open up opportunities for us to respond to God's call. My parents would say, "Never close a door that is open until you have looked at all possibilities." These open doors are God's way of calling. Praying, listening, and responding are ways of answering God's call.

God calls in many ways. Some calls come by simply seeing the need, being available, and having the resources. Other calls might be formal. I remember the first time I received a call in the form of a letter. The letter indicated that the women of my congregation wanted to place my name on the ballot for vice-president of our women's organization. I laughed and said, "I can't do that." My husband looked at me and asked, "Why not?"

I gave him many reasons. I told him that I lacked the time and the qualifications this position needed. To my list of excuses, he replied, "If those who know you think you are qualified, why are you so afraid?"

Sometimes others see our callings and need to give us encouragement. Later I agreed to run and was elected. It turned out to be the opportunity of a lifetime and the beginning of many years of leadership opportunities.

How do I discern God's call? By being open to God's leading, listening and praying, and the responding and accepting God's answers with confidence that God will provide.

Audrey Thompson—Atwater, Minnesota

T discern God's call when I put my faith into action by helping someone else or taking time to listen to my neighbor. I put my faith into action by helping in subtle ways. Whether it involves inviting a less popular coworker to lunch, or stopping to help a stranded motorist (even when I am running late), or when I talk to the kids in my neighborhood, these are some of the ways that I can actively answer God's call.

Sandy Wellers-Flint, Michigan

ost would agree that God calls us in different ways. As individuals, we may hear that call in a variety of ways.

I have tried to be a good listener to God's call for me in my life. I think I do better some days than others, but I always feel there is room for improvement. I have seen others who seem very good at not just discerning the call, but responding appropriately.

I think it is interesting that the theme for Women of the ELCA for the next Triennium will be "Listen, God Is Calling." I am anxious to see how we can better respond as an organization and as individuals. Name Withheld by Request—Seattle, Washington



# WHAT'S COMING UP?

### SEPTEMBER 2002

Chaos and God

Unpredictability is a part of life. We all experience it from time to time. How does our faith help us frame those challenging times and draw deeper insights from them?

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 1: All who are thirsty, come! (John 2:1-12, 19:25-37)

# OCTOBER 2002

Life Lessons

Jesus was a teacher for all. We take a look at the many ways in which we find ourselves in the role of teacher or student, both formally and otherwise. in matters of faith and in matters of life. Also, a look at all God's creatures and how they impact our lives.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 2: Strangers in the Night (John 3:1-21, 7:45-52, 19:38-42)

# **NOVEMBER 2002**

Cheerful Receiving

Do we sometimes have trouble receiving gifts from God, our family, friends, and others? A discussion on being a cheerful receiver. Also, what does being "in communion" mean?

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 3: Seeing and Believing (John 9:1-41)

READER CALL (Deadline July 10, 2002) Have you ever had to "take it on faith"? Resurrection and Life (John 11:1-53) Tell us about it.

IDEANET (Deadline July 10, 2002) How does your Women of the ELCA group or congregation work to increase fellowship and participation among new members?

# DECEMBER 2002

God with Us

How do we keep the presence of God with us and recognize it amid and within the cultural traditions of the Christmas season, as well as vear-round?

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 4: Grace upon Grace (John 1:1-18, Genesis 1:1-5)

READER CALL (Deadline August 10, 2002) In efforts to be all-embracing, have you celebrated other traditions (perhaps Kwanzaa, a Seder, etc.)? Briefly tell us of your experience.

IDEANET (Deadline August 10, 2002) How is your group involved with service projects or organizing volunteering opportunities to celebrate the spirit of the Christmas season?

# JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2003 Seeing the Light

As we celebrate Epiphany, we hear from some wise women who sought and found Christ and can tell us something about the journey and what their epiphany has in turn led them toward. Also, faith resolutions you can live with!

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 5: The Good Shepherd (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 10:1-18)

Grace Upon Grace, Session 6:

READER CALL (Deadline September 10, 2002) In a few words, share your hopes for the new year.

IDEANET (Deadline September 10, 2002) Prayer partners: How can you start such a program in your congregation? Share what has worked for you.

#### **MARCH 2003**

Get on Your Feet

As disciples, we are told to follow the Lord's example, demonstrating welcome and being of service to one another. In this issue we look at Jesus washing the disciples' feet and what it means for our own lives.

Grace upon Grace, Session 7: Welcome Home (John 12:1-8, 13:1-11)

READER CALL (Deadline November 10, 2002) Does your congregation have footwashings or a "foot night" for homeless in the community? In a few words, tell us how this act is cleansing to you.

IDEANET (Deadline November 10, 2002) Has your congregation ever participated in foot-washing? What thoughts would you offer to other congregations who are interested in beginning such a practice in their church? Share what works and other helpful tips to get started.

# **APRIL 2003**

Have You Seen the Lord?

The comfort and challenge of Easter. Celebrate Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, and grow in awareness of what it means to be a redeemed child of God.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 8: The Time of Trial (John 18:28-19:16)

READER CALL (Deadline December 10, 2002) When have you had to remind yourself that you are "a child of God"?

IDEANET (Deadline December 10, 2002)

Does your congregation or women's group lift up the accomplishments of younger members who are perhaps athletes, artists, or performers? How does your group interact or support local students?

#### MAY 2003

God Is Like ...

Naming God: What do we call God, and why? What does it mean to call God one thing but not another? We also look at some familiar (and some uncommon) ways to be inclusive.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Grace upon Grace, Session 9: "I Have Seen the Lord!" (John 20:1-18, 24-31)

READER CALL (Deadline January 10, 2003) Let us know what tops your prayer list.

IDEANET (Deadline January 10, 2003) How do you incorporate multicultural education and traditions in your congregation? Share with us your efforts to be welcoming and inclusive to all members of your community.

# **JUNE 2003**

Health, Wellness, and Healing

These topics will be explored in various ways in both summer issues of LWT. In this issue, we also take a look at intentional development of leaders in our communities and in our churches.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Leading Ladies of the Bible, Part 1

READER CALL (Deadline February 10, 2003) What biblical figure would be your "leading lady," and why?

IDEANET (Deadline February 10, 2003) Does your group exercise together when you meet? Does your circle do yoga after

Bible study? How does your group or congregation collectively appreciate or thank the Lord for the gift of health?

# **JULY/AUGUST 2003**

Health, Wellness, and Healing

These topics will be explored in various ways in both summer issues of LWT. In this issue, we also take a look at exciting gatherings that are taking place in the United States and Canada.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Leading Ladies of the Bible, Parts 2 and 3

READER CALL (Deadline March 10, 2003) Briefly describe what has been your favorite age, and why.

IDEANET (Deadline March 10, 2002)

How does your group or congregation work to involve the older or homebound members of the congregation?

LWT invites you to send in Reader Call or IdeaNet submissions. These two recurring departments allow readers to share with one another their thoughts and experiences on the topics listed. At the top of each submission, note the issue and topic along with your name, address, and phone number.

By sending in a Reader Call or IdeaNet submission, you give LWT permission to edit and use all or part of your written material. All other rights to the submission are yours. Authors of Reader Call submissions chosen for publication receive as a "thank you" a complimentary one-year subscription to LWT, to keep or to give as a gift. Those who submit IdeaNet ideas that are published will receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which the idea appears. Send your entries to:

Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631 or email to: lwt@elca.org

# **BIBLE STUDY: SEPTEMBER 2002-MAY 2003**

Grace Upon Grace: A Study of the Gospel of John



In the Gospel of John, Jesus turns water into wine, gives sight to the man born blind, and raises Lazarus from the dead. He has long conversations with Nicodemus, washes the feet of his disciples, and challenges Pilate. He tells his hearers that he is the bread of life, good shepherd, light of the world, and the way, the truth, and the life.

This nine-session study of the Gospel of John focuses on how John shows us who Jesus is-Word made flesh-through several stories not found in other Gospels. We invite you to a deeper study of these key texts so that you may come to understand more deeply not only the unique portrait of Jesus that emerges from this Gospel, but what the Gospel of John reveals to us through Jesus Christ.

This study is written by Mary Hinkle, associate professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary. Hinkle is a gifted teacher as well as a pastor with a keen understanding of the needs of group Bible study participants. The participant portion of this nine-session study appears in the September 2002 through May 2003 issues of Lutheran Woman Today magazine.

#### COMPANION STUDY RESOURCES

While the only essential piece needed to complete the Grace upon Grace study is a subscription to LWT, these companion pieces add depth and meaning to your study of the Gospel of John.

Please note that the Resource Book has been discontinued. Material formerly found in the Resource Book will now appear in Lutheran Woman Today alongside the study.

Call Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648 to order any of the resources listed below.

#### **LEADER GUIDE**

This resource contains everything the leader needs to make sessions more enriching and enjoyable: additional background not contained in LWT, a guide to each of the guestions in each session, tips on how to lead and direct the discussions, and more. (ISBN 6-0001-6342-8; \$6.95)

#### COMPANION BIBLE

This handy volume puts all the texts and cross-references in one place. It is also a convenient place to jot notes, underline, or highlight as you proceed through the study. It is printed in a comfortable, easy-to-read size.

# (ISBN 6-0001-6341-X; \$3.95)

#### **BOOKMARK**

Give this Grace upon Grace bookmark to prospective Bible study participants or as gifts to the group. Sold in packages of 12. (ISBN 6-0001-6340-1; \$3.50)

# **REGULAR FEATURES**

#### WOMEN OF THE ELCA BIBLE STUDY

Grace upon Grace: A Study of the Gospel of John

#### GIVE US THIS DAY

Marj Leegard's wit and wisdom on everyday life

#### **MOTHERING SEASONS**

Reflections on parenting and spirituality

#### **BOOKMARKS**

Directions for your own reading and help for book groups

#### BETWEEN YOU AND MF

Thoughts from the executive director or president of Women of the ELCA

Catherine Malotky's timely, prayerful reflections

#### IN THE SEASON

Articles connecting to the liturgical season

#### **IDEANET**

Reader ideas related to programs, resources, and events of the women's organization

#### READER CALL

Readers write and share their personal experiences in response to selected topics Session 2

# **Building the Body of Christ**



by Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl

LWT's summer study is written by three of the female bishops of the ELCA. Bishop DeGroot-Nesdahl will present her session at the Triennial Gathering.

#### **Study Texts**

Ephesians 4:13, 7–16; Luke 10:38–42; John 4:1–30

#### **Opening Prayer**

Dear God, we gather in your name to hear and study your word. Help us to open our hearts and minds, to you and to one another, that you might work through us to build the Body of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

#### **Careful Builders**

Builders have a motto: "Measure twice, cut once." Out of the experience of not measuring carefully enough or of "eyeballing" and then being mistaken grew this reminder to those who build that measuring accurately saves time and resources.

If you want what you are building to last, measuring carefully is essential. God is just such a careful builder, measuring meticulously so that the finished project is perfect. As evidence, think of the marvels of creation that build on one another and fit perfectly together. The cosmos itself seems to have been built by the Master Builder taking care to measure and fit; the length of days and nights follows the perfect schedule of the sun and moon rotating in their orbit.

1. Name some other marvels of creation that seem to build on one another and fit perfectly together. God displays the ability to build carefully and well all around us. Does this truth affect how we think about God's ability to build perfect community among believers?

Ephesians 4 talks about another measuring that God has done. In verses 7-16, the author describes the grace that is given to each believer and how that gift fits us together-joining individuals into the body of believers, the Body of Christ. God's "building plan" is laid out in verse 12, which says, in part, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ." God's intentions are clear: we will be one body in Christ, maintaining the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.

As God continues to carry out this enormous building project, we are each given gifts to add to the Body of Christ. It is as though each of us has received a board, our gift, and without it, God's building project could not go forward. Each board is perfectly measured and fitted to the others, so our contribution to the project fits perfectly and adds to the whole. God has carefully measured these gifts and continues to supply all the resources needed to build the project, the Body of Christ, the community of the faithful.

Review verse 12. List some of the "tools" one would need in order to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."

All the gifts are needed for the proper functioning of the Body. Each gift is measured, and therefore limited, so we must use our gift well but also remember that our gift alone cannot do the job. Every gift, and therefore every believer, matters and is needed for the building project.

#### **What Pieces Are Missing?**

A member of one of my parishes taught me to ask an important question. At the beginning of every meeting or gathering, she would ask, "Who's missing?" It sensitized us all to think of those not present, whether they were inactive members, neighbors who didn't know our church existed, non-believers, or those who simply could not be present due to physical limitations or some other situation. How differently we acted and conducted our business as a church when we thought first of those who were not present-of the gifts that were missing. It moved us to think of ways to bring more people to the activities of the church, and to enjoy the fellowship of this small part of the Body of Christ.

It made us more aware of the obstacles for some to join us. Physical obstacles were the easiest to deal with: We could build a ramp, schedule worship at alternate times, offer childcare, have signing for the deaf, and provide rides and phone trees to keep people informed of our ministry. God's building project went along smoothly in those areas.

The more challenging areas involved our attitudes, prejudices, and history. We had to reckon with our feelings about having homeless people use our building as a shelter, for example, or allowing AA groups to meet at the church, or being welcoming to the increasing ethnic diversity of our neighborhood and community.

3. Ask members to divide into groups of two or three and discuss who is missing from their church community, or from their Women of the ELCA unit. What's the significance of asking "Who's missing?" when we gather for events or activities at church? If the question has been asked in your congregation or unit, what has been the result?

Building up the Body of Christ involves getting all the measured gifts together, both the easy ones to fit together with and the tougher ones, and fitting everyone into the unity Christ provides for us. Each gift has value. For example, the list of gifts in verses 11 and 12 are not so important in terms of who is designated as a recipient of a gift; rather, the functions of the gifts are what is noteworthy: They equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ. Every gift mentioned serves that main function: to equip the saints so that the Body can be built up.

Another way the author emphasizes this point about the community being built is the use of the singular in verse 7: "to each one of us grace has been given." After that, all the references are plural. One does not build the Body of Christ alone. It follows that none of the gifts mentioned is given to just one: "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." We're working together in groups on a huge project that God, the Master Builder, has prepared, and for which God has equipped us perfectly. We have what we need, so the emphasis is on all, as in verse 13: "until all of us come to the unity of the faith."

Christian life is intended to be lived in community, not in isolation. Yet the author acknowledges in verse 14 that communal life can have its difficulties. Just as thinking about who is missing from the fellowship of our ministries raises challenges to the way we think about and behave toward others, so we see those challenges mirrored in this text. God knows this building project will not be easy.

#### **Living up to Our Potential as Builders**

Though some of the hardship will come from our efforts to reach those who have never met God nor know of the gifts of grace in Christ, those hardships may pale in comparison to the struggles we have as we try to live together "in the unity of the faith" with those we know full well as parts of the Body of Christ.

Verse 14 cites that problem when it refers to us as infants, as when our faith lacks maturity to discern true teaching, or when we fail to recognize manipulation and deceit. These are not the marks of coming to "the measure of the full stature of Christ." Yet we can recognize ourselves in these descriptions, particularly in times of conflict, great fear, or spiritual lethargy. It is especially then that we lack the qualities in verse 2 that describe the mature Christian: humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love, and finally, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. It is especially then that we need the encouragement of verse 15 to remind us of our potential as builders with God: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

- 4. Verse 14 refers to some as "infants," implying that their faith is not mature. What experiences in life may help to mature one's faith? Does mature faith only come with age? Can believers have "blind spots" in their faith, that is, aspects of their life that are less mature, faith-wise, than other aspects of their life?
- 5. Infants need a great deal of time and attention, yet they also need to be encouraged to acquire skills as they grow, ultimately to be able to take care of themselves. Discuss how this progression from dependency to independence is a positive or negative model for Christian community. Are there ways the Christian community might keep itself in infancy in terms of faith development? What are the risks involved in a mature faith?

#### **Growing to Our Full Stature**

God has given us all the gifts we need to build community together as believers. We have the tools to complete this project. God has been at this for quite some time already, and we pray that God will stay with it, and us, as God has promised to do, until it is finished. In the meantime, we rejoice in the work we have: equipping the saints for the work of ministry. We celebrate the gifts of other believers, and encourage each one to fit their perfectly measured gift into the whole. We challenge ourselves to ask, "Who is missing?" and to struggle with ways to bring more of the community together that the building might continue. We commit ourselves to speaking the truth in love to one another, and to growing to the full stature of Christ, as we grow in building the Body up in love.

6. Verse 15 talks about speaking the truth in love as a sign of our maturing in faith. What does the phrase "speaking the truth in love" mean to you? Jesus spoke in this way to the woman at the well, and to Martha at Bethany. Review these two incidents (Luke 10:38-42; John 4:1-30). What would be needed for modern believers to speak the truth in love to one another?

#### Closing

Reread Ephesians 4:1–3. Form a circle for closing prayer. Offer a sentence or petition of prayer. Give thanks to God for the gifts we all have received, and for the community of faith that is the Body of Christ.

# BIBLE STUDY Leader Guide: Session 2

This session on Ephesians 4 is about building community, as in building up the Body of Christ. Before the discussion begins, do some community building with your study group.

Plan a fun activity that everyone can be involved in, such as "hobby bingo." On a plain piece of paper, make a grid of 16 boxes. In each square, write a common hobby that you think at least some of the people in your group might have, such as golf, piano, hiking, baking, snowmobiling, quilting, antique collecting, etc. Pick a variety of hobbies, some more active than others, and throw in a surprise, like worm farming.

Make copies and distribute them when the group gathers. Allow time for people to get signatures on each box from someone else in the group who has that hobby. Gather the group together again, and go through the bingo card so everyone learns who has what hobby.

Talk a little about the group-building experience. Did anyone learn something new about someone else? How did this simple activity build community (for example by having fun, working on a common task, helping one another, learning about each other, etc.)?

#### **Opening Prayer**

See the opening prayer on page 29.

#### **Careful Builders**

Read Ephesians 4:7-16 aloud. Review with each other the Ephesians text from the previous session (Ephesians 4:4–5, 7, 11–13), to be reminded of the author of this letter and his audience. This letter is written not only for the churches in and around Ephesus; it is written for our own church as well. It is a living letter, important for us today, just as it was to the believers many years ago. Ephesians could be named "Peace through Grace," because that is its main theme.

- 1. Other "marvels of creation" that build on one another and fit together perfectly might be the food we are given that strengthens our bodies and brings us health, the water cycle, the food chain, the miracle of birth, etc.
- 2. Some answers might be a voice to tell the Gospel story, a prayer life to encourage the saints, a generous spirit to provide for those in need, and so on. Have group members reflect silently on people who have equipped them

in their faith life. Ask if anyone would share a story of their "equipper." Write down the names of these saints and remember them in the closing prayer at the end of this session.

#### What Pieces Are Missing?

3. Have participants share in small groups. Then have each group share a few of their results.

#### Living up to Our Potential as Builders

- 4. We exist in a constant state of "unfinishedness." This makes "blind spots" in our faith not only possible, but likely. We can narrow our blind spots and become less inhibited by them by pushing ourselves (or being pushed) out of our familiar territory and into situations that force us to examine our beliefs and suppositions and grow to accommodate a larger field of understanding. Just as for the muscles of the body, growth and development come with exercise. A wellexercised set of muscles builds the strength and health for the entire body. So it is for the Body of Christ. This growth can take place at many points throughout our lives. And the seasoning of these experiences, the building on lessons previously learned, brings added volumes of depth and understanding throughout our entire lives.
- Just as we do not stop learning once we 5. master walking, talking, and feeding and dressing ourselves, so spiritual growth does not end once we have mastered the basics. We can fall into thinking we know it all, so we stop looking for ways to grow. This happens to individuals, and it happens to faith communities. Maturing faith can lead one to a

different place, spiritually, from the community. This dissonance can be either negative or positive, depending on one's perspective.

#### **Growing to Our Full Stature**

6. When we interact with each other in community, we sometimes have opportunities to encourage growth, often called "teachable moments." The ways and means employed in these teachable moments can make all the difference in how the lessons are received.

In Luke, Jesus waits until Martha implores him to tell her sister to get up and get busy with the preparations. His gentle lesson is perfectly timed and makes a much greater impression than if he had addressed the situation differently. Conversely, in the story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria, the woman's style of learning comes from a growing question and answer session. Jesus uses a more direct style and it really hits home with her.

Both these examples show us that Jesus taught with love, whether the lesson was gentle or more jarring, and give us an unmistakable lesson-the right message at the right time with the right delivery makes all the difference.

#### Closing

Reread Ephesians 4:1–3. Form a circle for closing prayer. Ask each member to offer a sentence or petition of prayer, if they desire. Include the names of those saints mentioned earlier who had helped equip the group for ministry. Close with petitions and thanksgiving to God for the gifts we all have received, and for the community of faith that is the Body of Christ.

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# GATHERING AND SHARING

by Anne Basye

The Triennial Gathering offering is collected from Women of the ELCA congregational units as well as individuals. The offering will be formally presented at the 2002 Triennial Gathering in July in Philadelphia.

Fifty percent of the offering is directed to the churchwide organization in support of its commitment to building up the Body of Christ. The other half will be

distributed as grants to ELCA-endorsed international programs and projects initiated by churches around the globe. Some of those projects are described below.

Our goal is to collect \$400,000. With your support we can reach this goal and allow God's love to be poured out abundantly on many.

#### SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN INDONESIA

Two years into her studies at Satya Wacana Christian University in Indonesia, 21-year-old Luciana's education was jeopardized by escalating violence between Muslims and Christians in her home region. Family members were injured and lost homes and jobs. Too distracted by family worries to study and struggling to pay tuition, Luciana considered dropping out. A fiveyear scholarship project supported by ELCA funds is helping Luciana and others from her region stay in school. "Our students are happier and worrying less, but many are still in financial distress," says Konta Intan Damanik, former dean of external affairs.

# EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

In the Central African Republic, illiteracy is widespread and there are few educated people to fill leadership positions. Most girls do not receive even a primary school education. To develop new leaders for the country and the church, Central African Women for Christ, the women's organization of the Central African Republic's Lutheran church, focuses on sending girls to school and keeping them there. Arlette, Helene, Rosine, Salome, and Veronique-all from families with small means-are among the girls now attending high school. "Thanks to your prayers and God's help, we all hope to succeed," they say.

### SUPPORTING CHILDREN ORPHANED BY HIV/AIDS

More than 500 children in Nekemte, Ethiopia, have lost one or both of their parents to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has responded with a project whose purpose is to improve living conditions for these children and continue their education. Their relatives and caregivers-stigmatized by HIV/AIDS, often aging grandparents or parents nearing death of AIDS-related causes-can only afford substandard housing. Your offering will help 100 children from 5 to 17 receive food and school uniforms and materials. Health educators will also educate children and their families about living with people with HIV and preventing its spread.

### RESTORING AMPUTEES TO HEALTH AND WHOLENESS

Until rebels cut off both her legs below the knees in 1999, Kadiatu Fofanu supported her nine children through a small-scale food business. Now, a microcredit loan from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sierra Leone (ELCSL) has helped her open a similar business. Sponsorships through ELCSL cover tuition, books, uniforms, daily lunches, and transportation for one of her sons and for many other young amputees. ELCA funds have helped the ELCSL open new doors for people of all ages who were left handicapped and in need of acquiring new skills.

### REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN ON THE STREET

Ten-year-old Ronaldo is one of thousands of street children roaming the streets of São Paolo, Brazil. Fortunately, he gets three hot meals a day at the Children's Reconciliation Center, run by the Lutheran Congregation of Santo Amaro. At the Center, Ronaldo and 400 other street children do fun projects, read books, paint, attend chapel, and play with other kids. Your contribution will help the Center expand its support for older children by teaching them fundamental vocational skills and



Three children who participate in the Victimized Orphan Children Rehabilitation Project, with their HIV-positive mother.

providing the basic tools they need to support themselves and leave the streets. "Now that I go to the Center, I can make a better life for myself and live my dreams," Ronaldo says.

### BRINGING DIGNITY AND HEALTH TO THE POOR IN CHILE

For 20 years, women "health promoters" of Popular Education for Health (in Spanish, EPES) have battled rats, garbage, respiratory infections, AIDS, and the domestic violence that brews in the shantytowns of Santiago and Concepción, Chile. Your contribution will help this ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile train more women-all shantytown residentsto confront health issues and community problems, promote healthy, dignified lives for shantytown residents, and achieve new levels of control over their own lives.

# PROTECTING VULNERABLE WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THAILAND

Thousands of women and children in Thailand and Laos have been lured or forced into the sex trade. The Child Prostitution Prevention Program in Pattaya, Thailand, works to reduce the numbers of high-risk youth who move into the sex industry and encourages children currently engaged in prostitution to return to their families. Your offering will support Pattaya's outreach programs and a drop-in center that provides recreational, health, and educational services, as well as referral and support services.

### **EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK** IN MADAGASCAR

In the Malagasy Lutheran Church, women seminary graduates serve as Bible school and seminary teachers, chaplains, and evangelists. Unfortunately, they are not paid for their contributions, and they cannot be ordained-a serious obstacle for women in church and society. ELCA financial support will ensure that they receive pay for their work-an important first step toward equality for women in Madagascar.

#### EDUCATING FOR PEACE IN PALESTINE

Though bullets and heated rhetoric regularly fly around her home town, sixth-grader Dalia Nassar and her classmates grow educationally, socially, and spiritually at the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, Palestine. Christian and Muslim children study side by side in the five schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Palestine (ELCJ), which educate 2,300 students. Your offering will help pay tuition for 10 girls whose families cannot pay because they have been deprived of normal income during the turbulence of recent months.

# TO CONTRIBUTE

Make checks payable to: Women of the ELCA. Be sure to write "Triennial Gathering Offering" on the memo line. Send to Women of the ELCA, P.O. Box 71256, Chicago, IL 60694-1256.

Session 3

# **Called to Unity**



by Bishop April Ulring Larson

LWT's summer study is written by three of the female bishops of the ELCA. Bishop Larson will present her session at the Triennial Gathering.

#### **Study Texts**

Ephesians 4, Numbers 27:1–8, Mark 2:1–12

In earlier sessions, we learned how God gives people gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (4:11), and then how God calls us to use these gifts to equip others, "saints," for the work of ministry and for building up the Body of Christ (4:12)-two mighty important callings within God's kingdom.

In this session we look at a third call: To use our gifts "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (4:13). What a calling! Thankfully, we are not alone. The writer of Ephesians, as well as other scripture writers, have words of life for us. As we hear these words, we will see Christ, and God, and the Holy Spirit-indeed, the whole Trinity-calling us, cajoling us, and praying for us.

#### **Being in Christ**

Read Ephesians 1:3-4 and 2:10, 13. As you read, take note of the times the phrase "in Christ" appears. In the first four chapters of Ephesians, "in Christ" (or its equivalents "in him" and "in whom") is used some 20 times!

1. Identify someone you feel fits the description of being "in Christ." How might he or she serve as a role model or sign of hope, for you or for others?

We have all learned a lot lately about Katie Luther, Martin Luther's multi-talented spouse who was manager of the Luther household and their 40-room hostel, family accountant, grower of all the food, brewer of beer, nurse, and nurturer-and down-to-earth theologian! She was a woman "in Christ." In fact, as Katie Luther lay dying, her last words were reported to be, "I will stick to Christ like a burr to a topcoat!"

2. Follow Katie Luther's lead and come up with one or more images of your own to complete the phrase, "I will stick to Christ like . . ." (For instance, you might say, "like peanut butter to the roof of my mouth.")

Editor's note: If you or your group drafts some images you really like, share them with LWT. If response is good, the magazine will consider a follow-up article on such images. Mail (by October 1, 2002) to: Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189, Attention: "Sticking."

Ephesians is no stranger to tensions. Old and

new ways of living stand side by side: Once we lived "without Christ," now we live "in Christ." Once we were divided by a wall, now that wall is broken down. Once we were "strangers and aliens," now we are "saints and members of the household of God." And how did the old give way to the new? "By God's grace," Ephesians says bluntly and beautifully in 2:8, 9. (Read the rest of Ephesians 2 on your own-it is rich in describing those contrasts.)

3. What other pairs of opposites can you draft that put life without Christ and life with Christ side by side? (One idea: "Living in despair versus living in hope.") And remember, we are always "at the same time both saint and sinner" (simul justus et peccator), as Luther puts it. Read Philippians 3:12-14 for Paul's version of this truth.

If unity in Christ seems hard to grasp, then think about "community." For "community"-from the Latin cum (with) and "unity"—is simply "unity together." And community is something we can all touch and feel and be a part of.

One point before we continue: Many of us in the West could learn volumes about community from those who live in developing countries, or those living on the margins of society. They are real gifts and teachers to us, if our eyes are open to see and learn. That said, community can and does exist in wonderful ways in our lives, and in scripture! And often it is women who have caught the message. One of the benefits of community is that it can make people bold to do what they might never have done alone. Take, for instance, the little-known story of "The Five Daughters of Zelophehad" in the book of Numbers.<sup>1</sup>

#### Biblical Women (and Men) Mobilized to **Act Boldly**

Read Numbers 27:1–8. This story shows how a law actually got changed in the Old Testament for the benefit of women! It's a terrific story to tell youngsters, especially young girls. (Not only do the five daughters have names-not always the case in scriptural stories of womenbut they have fun ones for storytelling at that!) It is the daughters who ask the question to which God-in God's graciousness-can only say, "Yes!" It often takes only a few to change an injustice for the benefit of many.

4. How many have never heard this story before? Take a poll. Is the percentage high or low? If high, how might you share this story with children-or adults-in your life? Select a child or adult who is special in your life and think of a setting in which to share the story. Then do so. Report your experience back to your group at a future meeting.1

Another story-this time of men who acted together for the good of all-is Jesus' healing of the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12). Read the story as told by Zachary Garmen, age six: "There once was a man who could not walk. Lucky for him he had some good friends. His friends heard that Jesus was at a nearby house, so they carried the man who could not walk to that house. It was crowded like crazy. They got the man up on the roof and cut a hole in it. Then they put the man on his mat and lowered him through the hole. Jesus said to the man, 'Get up and walk!' The man got up and walked away. The people in the house said, 'Wow!' "2

This young boy captured the heart of the Ephesians message. He caught the community aspect ("Lucky for him he had some good friends"), and his concluding faith statement says it all: "Wow!" Isaiah tells us, "a little child shall lead them [us]" (11:6). Perhaps we should all sit at a child's feet to get the "wow factor" back into our faith lives. In the Rite of Holy Baptism in the Lutheran Book of Worship we, as a community, welcome the newly baptized-including infants-as "fellow members of the body of Christ" (very Ephesians!), "children of the same heavenly Father, and workers with us in the kingdom of God" (page 125).

Read Mark 2:3-5 and note all the references to "they," "them," and "their." The text does not mention the sick man's faith but refers rather to the faith of the community that brought him! Zachary got it right: Lucky this man had some good friends!

- 5. Check out the four texts below. For each, tell (a) what the community helped make happen, and (b) what you think might have happened had the community not been there to do its ministry:
  - 1. Exodus 1:8-21
  - 2. Exodus 17:8-13
  - 3. Acts 16:16-35
  - 4. Ruth 1:15–18 and 4:13–22

#### **Acting Together with Purpose**

Now who knows community better than Women of the ELCA, we who are created in God's image-that most basic gift that propels us toward life "in Christ"! Look at the Purpose Statement of Women of the ELCA. What a gem of community it is, meant for reading together! Let's do just that, and as we do, let's focus on the words in bold, feeling how much each phrase adds to the richness and strength of women acting together.

Let all God's people say,

"As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,

We commit ourselves to **grow** in faith, affirm our gifts, **support** one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and **promote** healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world."

Isn't it amazing how much the Purpose Statement sounds like Ephesians? You could almost take each phrase of the statement and find a basis for it in the epistle-placing it in a kind of "Ephesians grid" and seeing the points line up. (Not a bad activity to try on your own!) Now think of all those ministries Women of the ELCA does, churchwide, that we as individuals could not do alone.

6. What ministries come to mind when you think of the organization acting together?

We've hardly begun and already it's time to close. Yet there is much more to explore. Want to dig deeper? See the ideas in the Leader Guide.

#### Closing

Ephesians tells us that God's passion is that we

live in unity with Christ and with each other. Let us pray for that unity in the words below.

"O God, holy and eternal Trinity, we pray for your church in the world. Sanctify its life, renew its worship; empower its witness; heal its divisions; make visible its unity.

Lead us, with all our brothers and sisters, towards communion in faith, life and witness so that, united in one body by the one Spirit, we may together witness to the perfect unity of your love. Amen." <sup>3</sup>

- 1. For another version of the story, see "Why Not? (Five Sisters)" in *Miriam, Mary, and Me: Women in the Bible: Stories Retold for Children and Adults,* edited by Lois Miriam Wilson, Wood Lake Books, Inc. This story was reprinted in the May 1994 issue of *LWT*.
- 2. From Jesus, This Is Your Life: Stories & Pictures by Kids, edited by Jeff Kunkel, Augsburg Books, 2001 (available through Augsburg Fortress).
- 3. The Prayer of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, from the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute, Garrison NY, 10524-0300, used in the 1997 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity materials.

### **BIBLE STUDY** Leader Guide: Session 3

Ephesians is filled with pictures of God's radical grace shown forth in Christ. Women of the ELCA Bible study participants have been called "the best theologians in the church" by Chris Grumm, the first vice-president of the ELCA, for their faithful study of scripture over the years. As leader, you are co-learner with them. You don't have to be "the expert." This guide is designed to help your group be the community you already are.

Open with a short prayer of your choosing, and then conduct a short review of the verses of Ephesians examined in the first two sessions. (See paragraph two in participants' material.) Then highlight Ephesians 4:13, the focus of this session: "unity in Christ." Move the group through the material, stopping to explore the questions and spending more time on those of special interest to the group. The session should take about an hour. Following are some thoughts and possible answers for the questions.

#### **Being in Christ**

- 1. "In Christ"—that simple phrase embodies much wonderful mystery as it plays out in the lives of the faithful. Encourage examples. Give one of your own to start. Ask volunteers to share how they see their person as a sign of hope. Answers will vary; people are encouraged differently.
- 2. What a fun question this can be—and it's good to have a question or discussion that energizes early on! Let the group run with it as they wish. Imagination is part of our faith—Katie Luther knew that, and we're following in her footsteps. Send LWT your best ideas.
- 3. This one takes some imagination, too. Suggest the group work in pairs. Then have volunteers share their "opposites." Are there any to which the group is especially drawn? Why? Extend the discussion by calling attention to Ephesians 4:16. Note that the body of Christ is "joined and knit together by every ligament." Imagine that-every ligament and tendon! No wonder we confess, "There is one

body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

#### Biblical Women (and Men) Mobilized to **Act Boldly**

4. This little-known, wonderful story needs more "religious press." Enlist your women as special tellers of the story. See Numbers 36 for the rest of the story-how God settled the matter of husbands for the five daughters. (Note that they get to marry, within their own tribe, whomever they think best!) Also check out the Miriam, Mary, and Me book as a follow-up activity.

#### 5. The stories are, respectively:

- 1. Shiphrah and Puah, Egyptian midwives who disobeyed Pharoah's order to kill the Hebrew boy babies as they were born.
- 2. Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' weary hands to guarantee God's victory.
- 3. Paul and Silas singing at midnight in a Philippi jail, being freed by an earthquake, and converting the jailer and his family.
- 4. Ruth, pledging to accompany Naomi forever, and providing her with a child in the family, Obed, ancestor of David-and Jesus. Share with the group that Ruth acts as a "Christ figure" to Naomi, loving her even when Naomi tries to send her away. Ruth brings new life to an existence Naomi called "bitter."

What do you think might have happened had these believers not acted as a faithful community?

#### **Acting Together with Purpose**

6. Possibilities here might include: global education experiences, safe havens for children, stewardship materials, scholarships for mature women returning to school, grants to agencies that work for peace and justice for women and children, leadership development, Bible studies, anti-racism work, action on behalf of women and children in poverty, and more.

#### For Digging Deeper . . .

- a. Discuss ways to invite people from developing countries who are here in the United States to your church and homes to learn from them. These leaders of the fastest-growing churches in the world have much to teach us about walking in Christ and living together in unity in Christ's community.
- b. As follow-up, encourage participants to commit themselves to one of these actions:
  - Read Colossians (an earlier "cousin" of Ephesians). Note the many similarities to Ephesians.
  - Read Ephesians in a translation you don't normally use. From each chapter, select one or more verses to use devotionally in your prayers.
  - Memorize Ephesians 3:20–21, a powerhouse of praise and promise! Turn it into a magnet for your refrigerator door.

#### Closing

Ephesians tells us that God's passion is that we live in unity with Christ and with each other. Pray together the prayer found under "closing" in the study section.

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#### LWT: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

LS: I grew up on a farm in south central Wisconsin and attended a community school where, when enrollment reached 13, we were overcrowded. I was in fourth grade when I had my first classmate. After elementary school, I moved on to a high school with an enrollment of 65. Never having traveled outside the state, crossing the state line and the Mississippi River to attend Luther College was scary, exciting, and adventuresome.

Then on to greater travels! I graduated in 1957, a time you could take a job anywhere in the country or out of the country-I chose Colorado. With the skiing, mountain climbing, and hiking, my world was really expanding. All I had left to do was pay off my huge (\$2,000) college debt, and I would be ready to travel the world!

I went to Europe, traveling from Norway to Italy in two months. I slept on trains to save money, hitchhiked when it was possible-the world was wonderful!

After teaching and saving my money, my next jaunt was off to New Zealand and Australia to do a "working holiday." Washing dishes,

pots, and pans, peeling garlic, scrubbing floors, sewing zippers in a dress factory, folding sheets in a sheet factory-these were just some of the jobs I encountered. I found traveling wonderful and exciting. In the course of my travels, I encountered many people who were really adventurous-they had traveled in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This was part of the world I had not contemplated, but the more stories I heard, the more enchanting it sounded.

Lois Swenson, an alumna of Luther College, is a one-time classroom teacher turned full-time advocate. She shares here how she made this transition and how she has heard God's unmistakable call to be a voice for those whose own

voices are not heard.

#### That is certainly an exciting life so far, but what happened next? How did the time of transformation begin for you?

When the time came for my next chance to take a leave of absence from teaching, I headed off to South Africa.

This experience was pivotal. It was the beginning of seeing a whole different reality, my first exposure to the constant presence of poverty and injustice. I worked in an office as a file clerk and was deeply shocked by apartheid. I was told any sympathy or disapproval of

> the system could land me in prison! To be sure, I was very quiet, but I observed the incredible injustice. When I moved on to Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] while the struggle for independence was going on, I worked in a daycare center, always cognizant of the incredible gap between the majority and minority populations.

> I joined a group in Kenya to camp our way back to England. We traveled in Land Rovers, visited game parks, rode camels, slept in tents or out under the open skies, and paddled across rivers in dugout canoes. While on this trek, crossing the Sahara in a period of drought and war, I observed incredible poverty; for 13 weeks I observed the unbelievable underdevelopment, yet such beautiful people. At the time, I was

puzzled how travel books could make this reality I was seeing appear so glamorous. (I have since learned to go to the political science section of the library.)

I was disturbed by the critical, snide, cutting remarks made by many of my traveling companions-British, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders-about the U.S. aid they observed along the way. I could only write it off as jealousy; much later, I realized how much more they knew than I did about the role the U.S. was playing in the world!

#### How did your experiences abroad affect you after you returned home?

Returning from such a profound experience was very difficult. My friends' insistence that my living room and dining room carpeting needed to be updated and that I needed to wear the relatively recent fashions with color-coordinated hat, gloves, purse, and shoes made no sense after being with people who had no shoes and almost always slept on dirt floors.

Still, I could not understand why it was this way. A dear friend said, "That's the way it is! This is our culture-we were lucky to be born in the United States." I suspected that it had more to do with poor soil, climate, and a different value system.

Shortly thereafter, I joined a study group and started searching for more complete information on hunger and underdevelopment. I started to understand how the colonial past, economic structure, international trade policies and practices, and wealth and power concentration in the hands of a few were the causes of poverty. All these issues we read about and discussed were new to me. I would have never seen these things mentioned in the travel books I had read so enthusiastically before.

As a follow-up to the study group, I learned of a study trip to Guatemala and Honduras. Realizing they were close neighbors to us, I decided to participate in the trip.

#### What new learning did this next trip bring?

Little did I know what an impact the experience would have on me! We learned very painful lessons. I began to understand what my travel companions in Africa were talking about.

Most devastating to learn was the role my tax dollars were playing in keeping the poor in their place, rather than helping them to meet basic needs, such as healthcare, schools, and so on. I learned that we supported military equipment and police training in Guatemala, which kept a very brutal regime in power. I learned that this brutal regime came from the ruling class or the rich who owned the majority of the productive land, leaving the mountainsides for the vast majority to eke out a living. I learned that the rebels were the poor who had watched their babies die of starvation, worms, or the common cold, drinking water from rivers, streams, and lakes where the weekly bath and laundry had terrible effects on people's health! People can tolerate just so much, then they rebel.

I learned these lessons from campesinos who were illiterate but brilliant, who worked from daylight till dark, migrating around the country picking coffee, bananas, pineapple, cocoa, winter vegetables, and cut flowers for our altars and tables, while their own children are malnourished. Land that should feed the local population was providing my luxury foods. When I returned home, I started growing my own food.

#### Besides having your eyes opened and growing your own food, what other changes came with this knowledge?

Needless to say, this all compelled me to become active in speaking out, educating in schools, churches, making resolutions to church conventions, lobbying legislators, and protesting. I also continued studying more issues.

Since my initial study travel trip to Guatemala, I have returned to learn more about U.S. policy. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean continue today, in ways that are sometimes hard to hear and difficult to fully understand. But so much more happens than we see on the evening news. Currently, we are creating tremendous suffering in Colombia by sending millions of dollars supposedly to fight a drug war. Are we hearing the truth? We need to ask questions and hold our elected officials accountable for the actions they take on our behalf.

Take a look at Mexico. Many of us vacation there eeach winter, but how much do we know about our government's involvement in supporting the massive estarvation in all areas of Mexico? In 1994, a rebel group rose up in Chiapas in southern Mexico, in opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement. They were met with U.S.-supplied helicopters and the Mexican military. The results were horrific.

Many of the troops who participated in putting down the Chiapas uprising were trained at Fort Benning in Georgia, a military base where, alongside our own military, we have been training Latin American military leaders who return to their countries and oppress the poor. This is paid for with our tax dollars.

Each November on the anniversary of the murder in Chiapas, a growing crowd (last year estimated at 10,000 to 12,000) gathers at the gates of Fort Benning to say, "Close the School of Assassins!" Why do we have massive illegal emigration from their homes in Mexico and Central America? Not because they want to learn English!

I believe we are experiencing some of the troubles in the United States today because of what we represent to so many others in much of the world. Unfortunately, we can often represent dictatorship, bondage, and exploitation of the poor!

I read Isaiah 10:1-4: "Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners of fall among the slain? For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still."

There is so much anger throughout the world at some of the policies of the United States, and we must listen. They have feelings of deprivation, injustice, watching their loved ones die from lack of basic needs, pushed off their land to produce food for export to rich industrial nations at rock-bottom prices so we can enjoy our gluttonous lifestyle.

Then I reflect on our foreign policy in the Middle East and the Gulf. In Iraq, where we have been bombing continuously since 1991, it is estimated that more than 1 million people have died as a result of the sanctions we still have against that country-no medicines, no spare mechanical parts, no way to restore safe drinking water, children dying from cancer from the depleted uranium used in the bombs we drop. As Christians, we must work for peace and justice for all in the world!

I encourage all to become more educated in what we do as Americans and to take steps, even if it seems like one person against the world. If we join together one at a time, we can make a difference. Let us all listen to how God is calling us. Certainly we must care for our neighbors as ourselves. What will God call you to do? What path will your faith take you on? Are you open to the path you might be called to follow?

I feel fortunate that I have been able to be exposed to so much, yet the more I learn, the more disheartening it can be at times. It would all seem so overwhelming if I didn't have God's message at the heart of everything I do. I am but one small person on this planet. But I believe that faith can move mountains and change the way we live with each other.

Interested in the stories of other advocates and to check out The Compassionate Rebel: Energized (\$24.95 before tax and shipping) is available for

# STAND STILL AND SEE GOD'S GLORY

by Maryann Cavender Hood

Sometimes when my father faced difficult decisions he would say, "I'm between a rock and a hard place."

I imagine

that might be how

Moses felt when he and his people were trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's mighty army with 600 chariots. They couldn't jump into the sea and swim across with all their supplies and children. With little time to ponder, the angry Israelites blamed Moses for their predicament.

But Moses trusted God in this perplexing situation. He knew no problem would be too great for the Creator of the universe. Following God's command, Moses stretched his staff toward the sea. The Israelites passed through on dry ground, but the returning water swept away their pursuers, chariots and all.

Usually, we don't choose unpleasant experiences, but God never wastes an opportunity. When we put our trust in God, our struggles can serve to strengthen us, making us even more useful in building God's kingdom.

Even knowing this, we-like the Israelites in the midst of trying timessometimes become weak-kneed and forget that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Health problems leave me with few pain-free days. After a bout with cancer in 1991, I retired from teaching school. In moments of doubt, I wondered whether God could use me again or if my days of usefulness were over.

About a year ago, pain in my back, hip, and leg grew steadily worse. I finally sought help from a rheumatologist. He advised various tests, then sent me to a neurologist who ordered more tests. Both doctors suggested that a chiropractor might help me avoid back surgery.

After seeking a local chiropractor's services without much success, my son, also a chiropractor and teacher of exercise physiology, persuaded me to let him try to help. At first I was reluctant to go to his faraway home and leave my husband for five weeks. But eventually, desperate for relief, I decided to go. After all, I could only stand a few minutes at a time without severe pain. I feared that a wheelchair would be necessary in a short time.

Besides adjustments and exercises, my son and his wife put me on a low-fat diet. At first, I could only walk slowly for a few minutes on the treadmill, but gradually I worked up to seven miles a day. I lost about twenty pounds-weight I'd gained over years of neglecting exercise.

The walking and weight loss enabled me to be more mobile and stand longer. I still have some pain and numbness, but I can prepare meals, do the family wash, and make the beds, even though the exercise program takes a big chunk of my day. While I walk, I memorize scripture, pray, and listen to music and tapes. I keep a pencil and pad handy to jot down ideas for poems or articles.

As thankful as I am for improved health, I don't feel that better health was the biggest benefit of my trip to Texas. The first Sunday I was in Austin, my son suggested that we go for a short hike, but I said, "I'd rather go to church." With reluctance, he and his five-year-old son got ready and went to church with me. For five Sundays, we attended services together.

When grandson Daniel came home from kindergarten every day, we had fun together. We played catch and read children's books and Bible stories. We dramatized his favorites: David and Goliath, and Jonah and the big fish, using his Mighty Ducks as props. We also made pumpkin pies, sang, and reviewed schoolwork while we waited for his parents' return. I enjoyed bonding with my young grandson.

But can you imagine my joy the Sunday after I came home when I got a call from Daniel? "Grandmommy!" he said, "Daddy and I went to church this morning." An even bigger thrill came a few days later, when my son called and said, "I know I told you I didn't need anything for Christmas, but if you really want to get me something, I'd like a nice leatherbound Bible."

What a blessing! Once again, I sensed the truth of Romans 8:28. If my health had not been so bad, I would not have stayed five weeks with my son and his family. The next time I have a crisis and feel sandwiched between a rock and a hard place, I'll trust God to work out the details. Bible study and prayer will give me confidence that I'm headed in the right direction.

I'll also try to remember what Moses told the frightened Israelites when they faced Pharaoh and his army on one side and the Red Sea on the other: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13, KJV).

Maryann Cavender Hood retired after teaching for 30 years in Alabama public schools. She now devotes her time to writing, teaching adult Sunday school, gardening, and other hobbies. She also enjoys playing the piano and leading songs for nursing home residents.



#### **BETWEEN YOU AND ME**

CATHERINE I.H. BRAASCH BEGAN HER TERM AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA IN SEPTEMBER 1997. AS SHE PREPARES TO EMBARK ON THE NEXT PART OF HER LIFE'S JOURNEY, WE SAT DOWN TO ASK HER A FEW QUESTIONS AND REFLECT WITH HER ON HER TIME WITH THE ORGANIZATION.

LWT: Your term as executive director has seen a lot of changes in the world and within the organization. What one external trend has had the biggest impact on your tenure here, and why?

Over the years, women's ministry groups have identified, prepared, and mentored many a future leader in church and society. That work is bearing fruit. Today, more so than even five years ago, women are taking on more roles and challenges.

On the one hand, the growing influence of women in leadership can be celebrated as a sign of "mission accomplished." On the other hand, we're no longer the only show in town when it comes to women's leadership development, and we haven't been for many, many years. Our challenge as Women of the ELCA is to become the preferred choice of women of all ages who want to grow in faith, find community and sisterhood in Christ, and together lead and act boldly on their faith.

LWT: You've met women from all over during the past five years and have seen first-hand how Women of the ELCA changes lives. Can you share a particular instance that was very meaningful to you?

Just one?

LWT: OK, maybe two . . .

Last November 19, a young mother and her three children were baptized in our congregation, and her husband was received by affirmation of his baptism. What a joy! Yet the real surprise came on the following Monday morning. I was on vacation, and, for the first time in a long time, I was able to drop in on Monday quilting at church. There, feeding strips of quilting scraps through the sewing machine, was the newly baptized woman! As she sewed, she told me how the other quilters, all women in their 70s or better, had welcomed her, included her, and by their example and words, helped prepare her for baptism. Surprised? Not really. These are the same women who welcomed me as a newcomer to our rural congregation eight years ago.

Today, our Palestinian sisters in Christ are very much on my mind. They are women living faithfully, witnessing daily to the reconciling love of Christ, the love of neighbor, the love of God's justice, the longing for God's peace in the land we call holy. I met many of them last November as a member of the ELCA delegation to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan. What I saw and who I met changed my perspective and deepened my appreciation for what it means to put one's Christian faith on the line daily.

LWT: As you reflect on the many and diverse projects you've been involved in as executive director, what would you say is the one with the most potential to change and uplift the participants involved?

Women of the ELCA are known for doing a lot of things right and well, so there is a wealth of examples from which to choose. However, beginning in 2002-2005 and beyond, we'll focus on the mission through intergenerational ministry, creation of healthy communities, and active attention to issues which, in harming women and children, harm society as a whole. This is a great example to highlight.

#### LWT: If you could change any one thing, what would it be?

I hope the organization, especially locally, will consciously become more hospitable and accessible to all women who want to be mobilized and energized for faith-based response to the challenges and opportunities of life around the world and across the street.

#### LWT: What would that look like?

There'd be an active, vibrant Women of the ELCA ministry in every congregation, church college, seminary campus, and in other institutional settings where women cannot readily participate in a congregational unit. There might even be virtual units, where women-on-the-go can check in on-line with sisters in Christ. Regardless, each unit would be an oasis where women could retreat, recharge, re-evaluate, and be renewed for faithful daily living. And I'd be considered a Woman of the ELCA by virtue of my commitment to Christ, to the mission and purpose of Women of the ELCA, and by my participation in any ministry or service that fulfills the mission and purpose statement.

LWT: If you had a wish to share for Women of the ELCA, what would it be?

How about every woman in this church subscribing to Lutheran Woman Today? I bet that would make you smile!

LWT: It would make our publisher smile, too! Let's take a look down the road. What lies ahead for Cathi Braasch?

My academic work for the master of divinity degree was completed two years ago, and now I'll go on to internship and preparation for first call and ordination. My husband, Red, and I have requested assignment in a less humid, non-metropolitan area of the western United States.

LWT: Going to a congregation? Hmmm, where are those subscription forms for Lutheran Woman Today?

I'll take some! Seriously, these 15 years of ELCA churchwide ministry have been great practical preparation for congregational service. LWT and the other Christ-centered, user-friendly women's ministry resources of Women of the ELCA are definitely going with me to the parish.

LWT: Any final thoughts?

Just this: God, who has faithfully worked through the witness of women for generation after generation, still has things in mind for women's ministry that make our dreams and plans pale by comparison. When we say that our mission is to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ, we'd better be ready to receive more than we can imagine!

LWT: Thanks, Cathi. Godspeed.



# **Listening and Hearing**

by Catherine Malotky

OKAY, GOD, I'M LISTENING. AND THESE DAYS, I FEEL LIKE ELIJAH (1 KINGS 19:11-13). I'VE BEEN FOLLOW-ING THE BEST I CAN, AND I'M NOT HEARING TOO MUCH, CAN YOU HEAR MY FOOT TAPPING AWAY THE MINUTES, SILENT GOD?

Okay, so I have gifts. Sometimes I even believe that. But how am I supposed to use them?

It's feast or famine. So often, I'm swamped. So many vie for my energy and attention. My kids need me, my church needs me. I have things to give. My community needs me, too, sometimes it needs anything I have. I could give and give and give; I can wind up feeling utterly wrung out.

Or it's famine. No one vies for my gifts, and I feel like a racehorse stuck in the starting gate, waiting for the gun, snorting my impatience. When the needs don't match my gifts, what then? When the options for giving are narrow, what then? When I bring my gifts, and I hear "no," what then? Some days, I want to go pout under a broom tree (1 Kings 19:4). How is this supposed to work?

God, are you listening?

I need some food for this journey. I need to know this isn't all just a bunch of bunk.

"Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Drink of this, all of you. This is my blood, shed for you."

Well, okay, a little food. You fed Elijah, too (1 Kings 19:5–7), didn't you?

While we are sharing this little meal, would you point me in a direction, give me an ultimate destination so I know at least if I'm aimed right?

I'm getting the hint. It's not about the great wind. You're not going to rearrange my hair and make me someone I'm not. It's not about the earthquake. You're not going to explode onto the scene, energy going every which way. It's not about the fire. You're not going to burn a clear path in front of me.

It's the sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:12). Listening means waiting, trusting, releasing myself to you. It means you will welcome me, honor my gifts, and invite me to be a co-creator of my world with you.

Is it my direction to serve as my situation and resources warrant? To cling to you as my most faithful home? To rejoice in the opportunities that come, free to say yes or no, as I am called, and free to redirect my giving when "no" blocks any given path?

Orient me, God. I hear water, splashing three times. I hear your declaration, "Child of God, you have been marked with the cross of Christ, and sealed by the Holy Spirit forever." You will never stop calling me, will you, God?

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she also has been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, writer, and retreat leader. She and her husband have two daughters.

#### **READER CALL TOPICS AND DEADLINES**

Mail or email to LWT Editorial Office

#### December 2002

In efforts to be all-embracing, have you celebrated other traditions (perhaps Kwanzaa, a Seder, etc.)? Briefly tell us of your experience.

Due August 10, 2002

#### January/February 2003

In a few words, share your hopes for the new year.

Due September 10, 2002

#### March 2003

Does your congregation have foot-washings or a "foot night" for the homeless in the community? In a few words, tell us how this act is cleansing to you.

Due November 10, 2002

#### **IDEANET TOPICS AND DEADLINES**

Mail to LWT Editorial Office or email IdeaNet@elca.org

#### December 2002

How is your group involved with service projects or organizing volunteering opportunities to celebrate the spirit of the Christmas season?

Due August 10, 2002

#### January/February 2003

Prayer partners: How can you start such a program in your congregations? Share what has worked for you.

Due September 10, 2002

#### March 2003

Has your congregation ever participated in foot-washing? What thoughts would you offer to other congregations who are interested in beginning such a practice in their church? Share what works and other helpful tips to get started.

Due November 10, 2002

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### WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

At *LWT*, we are always thinking about new ways to invite you—our good and faithful readers—to participate in the magazine. Many of you may have visited the web site to read articles, find out about future issue themes or Bible studies, and so on. This month we offer you something new online.

Go to: www.elca.org/wo/lwt

### We are pleased to introduce the first-ever interactive, online questions for *Lutheran Woman Today*

For each issue, a question relevant to an upcoming issue theme will be posted on our site. (The question will also appear in print somewhere in each issue of *LWT*.) Each question will be available online for a limited time, allowing you to register your response. When that time frame has ended, the individual responses will be tallied. The compiled results will appear in a future issue of *LWT*. It's a great way to register your thoughts and feelings about different topics that will be appearing in *LWT*. So, let's not delay any longer. Read this month's question and enter your answer today!

You may visit www.elca.org/wo/lwt from July 12 through August 12, 2002, to enter your personal response.

#### This Month's Question

(Results will appear in December 2002 issue):

You may be involved in a number of different volunteer activities (such as helping out at a soup kitchen, visiting the homebound, etc.). When you participate in these activities, do you:

- A. Go alone
- B. Participate as a family
- C. Participate with friends
- D. Attend as part of a church organization
- E. A combination of the above

### the magazine of Women ELCA

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